



GENERAL ORDER OPS-48 VEHICLE PURSUITS

EFFECTIVE SEPTEMBER 10, 2020

This General Order contains the following numbered sections:

- I. POLICY
- II. PURSUIT PROTOCOLS
- III. COMMUNICATION PROTOCOLS
- IV. USE OF TIRE DEFLATION DEVICES
- V. STOLEN VEHICLE SLOWDOWN
- VI. ROADBLOCKS
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- VIII. TRAINING AND REVIEW
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I. POLICY

The Howard County Department of Police (HCPD) shall maintain the safety of the public and the safety of its officers as the primary concern when engaged in any vehicle pursuit situation.

II. PURSUIT PROTOCOLS

- A. Officers shall utilize the Pursuit Matrix located in Appendix A when determining if a pursuit shall be initiated.¹
 - 1. The matrix shall be utilized as the officer and supervisor continuously re-evaluate the pursuit to determine if the pursuit shall be continued or discontinued.
 - 2. The officer shall keep safety in mind at all times. Factors to consider when deciding whether to begin or discontinue a pursuit include but are not limited to:²
 - a. Reasons for the pursuit;
 - b. Vehicle speeds, road, and weather conditions;
 - c. Pedestrian and vehicular traffic;
 - d. Possible loss of communications;
 - e. Officer safety concerns;
 - f. Knowledge of the area; and
 - g. Any reasonable expectation that the vehicle or operator can be identified and apprehended at a later time.
 - 3. The ranking supervisor with knowledge of the pursuit has the responsibility of either authorizing a continued pursuit or canceling the pursuit.³
- B. Police vehicles in the pursuit shall be operated with all emergency equipment activated.⁴

¹ CALEA 41.2.2b

² CALEA 41.2.2a

³ CALEA 41.2.2g, 41.2.2i

⁴ CALEA 41.2.2d

- C. Operators of non-pursuit rated vehicles shall be aware of the limitations of these vehicles and in general circumstances should follow the prohibitions relating to unmarked vehicles when initiating or participating in a pursuit.
- D. HCPD motorcycles and specialty vehicles such as the tactical van, HCPD bus, etc., shall not engage in a pursuit except in the most exigent of circumstances and only until relieved by a marked patrol vehicle.⁵
- E. Unmarked vehicles may initiate a vehicle pursuit.⁶
 - 1. When sufficient marked vehicles become involved in the pursuit, the unmarked car will continue operating non-emergency at the posted speed limit along the pursuit route to assist in the identification of the vehicle or operator.
 - 2. The controlling supervisor may assign additional units to continue in this capacity, as appropriate.⁷
- F. When the risk of injury to the officer or the public from a vehicle pursuit outweighs the perceived danger of not apprehending the suspect(s), a pursuit will not be initiated or continued.⁸ Officers involved in a vehicle pursuit will be held accountable for the continuation of the pursuit when circumstances dictate the pursuit should have been terminated.⁹
- G. Caravanning of vehicles during pursuits is prohibited. Other units will take up positions along the pursuit route in case the suspect should double back.
 - 1. Supervisors shall not permit patrol beats to be stripped of coverage.
 - 2. Supervisors will monitor the number of units involved in a pursuit to ensure there are adequate units on the scene once the suspect vehicle is stopped.¹⁰
- H. Officers shall not discharge a firearm at or from a moving vehicle except in deadly force situations as described in General Order OPS-11, Use of Force.
- I. Officers will not intentionally use their vehicle to bump or ram a suspect's vehicle to force the vehicle to a stop.
 - 1. Ramming is a form of deadly force and may be initiated only after all other reasonable means have failed. Deadly force may only be applied under circumstances outlined in General Order OPS-11, Use of Force.
 - 2. Officers must weigh the potential hazard created by a deploying airbag and the potential to involve and negatively impact other motorists or pedestrians in the immediate vicinity when determining whether to apply deadly force in this manner.
- J. Prior to proceeding through an intersection against the direction of any traffic control device, officers shall ensure that the intersection is clear, any other vehicular traffic at the intersection has stopped, and no other vehicles are entering the intersection prior to proceeding through the intersection.

⁵ CALEA 41.2.2e

⁶ CALEA 41.2.2e

⁷ CALEA 41.2.2g

⁸ CALEA 41.2.2a

⁹ CALEA 41.2.2h, 41.2.2i

¹⁰ CALEA 41.2.2g

- K. Supervisors may consider blocking exit ramps and side streets to ensure that the suspect vehicle will continue on the roadway on which it is traveling.¹¹ Consideration should be given to traffic volumes and sight distances before deciding on this course of action.¹²
1. This may be done to direct the suspect toward a tire deflation device or to keep the suspect from entering a more densely populated area.
 2. This action may not constitute the use of deadly force.
- L. The pursuing officer(s) will abandon the pursuit when:¹³
1. Weather, traffic, other roadway conditions, or other risk factors identified in Appendix A, make the pursuit unsafe;
 2. It becomes apparent that the immediacy of apprehension is outweighed by a clear and present danger to the officer or others; or
 3. Directed to abandon the pursuit by a supervisor.
- M. Because of potential communications limitations and officer unfamiliarity with the geography, pursuits should be re-evaluated by the pursuing officer(s) and Supervisor(s) before leaving Howard County.
1. No pursuit shall leave Howard County without supervisory approval.¹⁴
 2. Officers must be mindful of the possible loss of communications when leaving the County and assess further action against the threat to their safety.
 3. Additional factors to be considered should include:
 - a. How far effective radio communications can likely be maintained;
 - b. The presence of sufficient back-up officers engaged in the pursuit; and
 - c. The apparent number of suspects in the pursued vehicle.
 4. If the pursuit crosses into another jurisdiction, the HCPD officer shall relinquish the pursuit to officers from that jurisdiction as soon as appropriate.
 - a. After the local jurisdiction assumes the pursuit, the HCPD officer may continue operating non-emergency at the posted speed limit along the pursuit route to assist in the identification of the vehicle or operator.
 - b. The controlling supervisor may assign additional units to continue in this capacity, as appropriate.¹⁵
- N. Any officer who becomes involved in a pursuit that was initiated in another jurisdiction and enters Howard County will follow all procedures and guidelines established by this General Order.
- O. Supervisors should request the assistance of a police aircraft whenever a vehicle pursuit is initiated.¹⁶ Refer to Memo 2019-01, Aviation Support, for guidelines.

¹¹ CALEA 41.2.3 b and d

¹² CALEA 41.2.2g

¹³ CALEA 41.2.2a

¹⁴ CALEA 41.2.2g

¹⁵ CALEA 41.2.2g

¹⁶ CALEA 41.2.2g

1. Once the fleeing vehicle comes under the surveillance of a police aircraft, the flight crew will assume primary pursuit coordination with a limited number of ground units to identify and potentially apprehend the suspect.
 2. Supervisors should give strong consideration to discontinuing active pursuit by the ground units and direct them to follow the suspect at a safe distance and speed.¹⁷
- P. Officers shall not pursue motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), or dirt bikes once the intent to flee is exhibited. Under exigent circumstances, a supervisor may allow an officer to pursue a motorcycle.
- Q. Officers transporting prisoners shall not engage in a pursuit.
- R. Officers with a ride-along or other passengers in the vehicle shall not engage in a pursuit until the ride-along or passenger has been let out of the vehicle at a safe location.
1. The officer dropping off the ride-along or passenger shall notify another unit to pick up the ride-along or passenger.
 2. In the most urgent and exigent circumstances where the pursuing officer does not have an immediate opportunity to discharge the ride-along or passenger, the officer may engage in the pursuit only until relieved by another marked police vehicle.
- S. Officers will maintain post-pursuit discipline once a stop is made.
1. Sufficient officers will remain on the scene to ensure safety and maximize the chance of apprehension. No other units will respond to the termination point unless requested by the pursuing officer or supervisor.
 2. The supervisor will clear any units no longer needed at the scene.

III. COMMUNICATION PROTOCOLS

- A. The officer initiating a pursuit will immediately notify Communications of his location; the pursued vehicle's description; current speed; the violation warranting pursuit; and traffic, road, pedestrian, and weather conditions. Supervisors shall not allow pursuits to continue without this information being provided.¹⁸
- B. Communications shall immediately simulcast on all channels, broadcast a short alert tone, and advise all units of the pursuit.¹⁹
- C. The area Supervisor must acknowledge the pursuit, which indicates his assumption of command.²⁰
- D. The Watch Commander must acknowledge the pursuit. The Watch Commander is responsible for the pursuit regardless of whether he takes command.
- E. Officers engaged in a pursuit must maintain radio contact.²¹
1. The car radio must remain on the primary dispatch channel during the entirety of the pursuit unless the pursuit exits Howard County. If this happens, the officer shall follow the radio communication procedures outlined below.

¹⁷ CALEA 41.2.2g

¹⁸ CALEA 41.2.2c, 41.2.2g

¹⁹ CALEA 41.2.2f

²⁰ CALEA 41.2.2g

²¹ CALEA 41.2.2c

2. When practicable, a second officer involved in the pursuit will take over the communication responsibilities for the primary pursuit officer.²²
 3. Other officers who have been directed to assist in the pursuit will follow the directions given by the primary pursuit officer or by a Supervisor.
 4. The supervisor has the final authority.
- E. Officers and supervisors involved in a pursuit shall remain mindful of communication factors related to exiting the County or involving other police agencies as not all agencies use common procedures for radio communications. During multi-agency pursuits, officers shall use plain English for all communications and avoid the use of 10-codes, signals, slang phrases, and abbreviated terms.²³
- F. If an officer or Incident Commander believes that a pursuit will exit Howard County:²⁴
1. The officer and/or Supervisor should reconsider if the pursuit should be continued. The area Supervisor should consider the increased risk caused by changing radio frequencies when deciding if approval to continue the pursuit out of the County is warranted.
 2. The officer shall immediately notify Communications of the jurisdiction he believes the suspect will be entering. The Supervisor shall make the determination if the pursuit should continue or if the officer shall discontinue the pursuit.²⁵
 3. Communications shall:²⁶
 - a. Notify the appropriate jurisdiction of the pursuit about to enter their jurisdiction, verify the interoperability talk group channel, and advise them that a Howard County unit will be contacting them on their channel.
 - b. Advise the officer to prepare to switch to that channel upon crossing the county line.
 - c. Ask the Incident Commander if the officer should switch to the other jurisdiction's channel and identify which Supervisor will switch channels with the officer.
 4. If the area Supervisor approves the pursuit to continue out of the County, the Supervisor or his designee shall switch to the designated channel with the officer in pursuit.²⁷
 - a. If the Supervisor is not able to switch to the designated channel due to his location, he shall notify Communications. Communications shall advise the Supervisor to switch to another alternate channel where they will patch the supervisor through to the corresponding interoperability talk group channel.
 - b. As the supervisor is leaving the county, he must switch to the channel of the operation.
 5. If the HCPD officer loses communication with all police dispatch centers, he shall re-evaluate all risk factors to determine if continuation is clearly warranted.
 6. Officers and Supervisors shall remain cognizant of the fact that the Signal-1 button will not be heard if an emergency occurs outside of HCPD radio system range.

²² CALEA 41.2.2d

²³ CALEA 41.2.2d

²⁴ CALEA 41.2.2a, 41.2.2j

²⁵ CALEA 41.2.2i

²⁶ CALEA 41.2.2f

²⁷ CALEA 41.2.2g

7. Each officer involved in a pursuit that switches to an alternate channel shall identify themselves by stating "Howard County Police" followed by their unit number, the word "to" and the agency that the officer is calling, e.g., "Howard County Police 1B31 to Baltimore County PD Dispatch".
 - a. Provided that the channel is not currently in use, the dispatcher should respond immediately, e.g., "Baltimore County PD Dispatch to Howard County Police 1B31, go ahead".
 - b. The HCPD officer should then state the reason that they are calling and what action is requested of the other jurisdiction, e.g., "Howard County 1B31 is in pursuit of a...".
 - c. Once initial contact has been established and the reason given for the call, the communication proceeds in a normal fashion until complete.
 - d. Before officers return to Howard County radio channels, all officers shall identify themselves and inform the appropriate dispatch center that they are switching back to their normal channel.
8. Officers and supervisors shall recognize that continuing a pursuit into another jurisdiction increases the risks inherent in all pursuits.
9. All radio operations shall be conducted in accordance with Federal Communications Commission (FCC) procedures and requirements.

IV. USE OF TIRE DEFLATION DEVICES

- A. The use of tire deflation devices should be considered as a way to quickly and safely resolve a vehicle pursuit.²⁸
 1. Officers may only use HCPD-issued tire deflation devices that have been approved by the Education and Training Division (E&T) and the Chief of Police.
 2. Use of such devices will not be considered a roadblock or the application of deadly force.
- B. Tire deflation devices will be deployed using the following criteria:²⁹
 1. Deployment will only be done by officers who have been trained and authorized by the HCPD.³⁰
 2. Authorized officers will only deploy the devices after receiving approval from a supervisor.³¹
 3. Once the tire deflation device has been deployed, the deploying officer will announce the location of the deployment on the operational channel. Supervisors may wish to request dispatch to rebroadcast the location.
 4. Tire deflation devices will not be used on vehicles that have fewer than four wheels.
- C. After use, the operator will replace any damaged Stop Stick cartridge. Any damaged Stop Stick cartridges or deployment sleeve will be turned in to the appropriate District Patrol Office for repair or replacement.

²⁸ CALEA 41.2.2d and 41.2.3a

²⁹ CALEA 41.2.3b

³⁰ CALEA 41.2.3c

³¹ CALEA 41.2.3d

V. STOLEN VEHICLE SLOWDOWN (SVS)

- A. Technology from OnStar by GM enables OnStar advisors to slow down stolen vehicles remotely, assisting in the prevention of high-speed pursuits.
- B. This option is available primarily for stopping stolen vehicles but may also be utilized for DUIs, missing persons, and pursuits not involving a stolen vehicle, provided there is imminent danger to others, with approval from a supervisor and OnStar management.

VI. ROADBLOCKS

A. Definitions

- 1. Checkpoint: A point on a roadway where all vehicles are stopped for a law enforcement purpose that allows vehicles to be checked before continuing. This does not normally involve the use of deadly force.
- 2. Roadblock: A natural or man-made obstruction in the roadway that stops or diverts vehicular traffic.
 - a. Hard Roadblock: A roadblock where heavy material, vehicles, or equipment is used to stop or divert an approaching vehicle. This type of roadblock may constitute the use of deadly force under certain circumstances and will only utilize County-owned vehicles and property for the roadblock.
 - b. Soft Roadblock: A roadblock where signs, flares, barricade devices, or other warning devices are used which, if struck, cause little or no damage. This type of roadblock does not normally constitute the use of deadly force and should be considered as an alternative to the hard roadblock.

B. Use of Roadblocks³²

- 1. Officers may initiate a roadblock with supervisory approval and consistent with training only after all other reasonable and conventional means have failed.³³ This means that the use of lights, including overheads, dash lights, headlights, and grill lights, siren, and horn have proven unsuccessful.
- 2. Only a supervisor may authorize the implementation of a roadblock. Before authorizing a roadblock, the supervisor will:³⁴
 - a. Evaluate available information and decide if a roadblock is appropriate considering the imminent threat to the personal safety of the public, police, and violator.
 - b. Consider the following:³⁵
 - i. The number of members available for assignment to the roadblock;
 - ii. The seriousness of the crime or incident;
 - iii. The sufficiency of the information and descriptions of wanted persons and vehicles;

³² CALEA 41.2.3a and c

³³ CALEA 41.2.3a

³⁴ CALEA 41.2.3d

³⁵ CALEA 41.2.3a

- iv. The traffic and roadway conditions;
 - v. The available time and methods to provide a reasonable system of warning to motorists; and
 - vi. The type of roadblocks and the selection of the most appropriate one for the circumstances.
- 3. Only marked police vehicles should be used in roadblock situations for easy identification purposes. Police motorcycles shall never be used in roadblocks.
- C. Hard roadblocks constitute a danger to the police, public, and violator. This type of roadblock is rarely permissible and will only be used in situations when deadly force is appropriate.
 - 1. This type of roadblock will not be used if the following conditions exist:
 - a. Over the crest of a hill where visibility is poor;
 - b. During foggy or misty weather conditions;
 - c. Around a curve in the roadway due to limited reaction distance; and
 - d. Any location where there is a limited sight distance problem.
 - 2. Hard roadblocks will be used in conjunction with a clearly visible safe passage for a suspect onto a road that limits hazards and increases the likelihood of apprehension.³⁶
- D. Soft roadblocks are less dangerous and should be given consideration.
- E. Checkpoints may present the best option in identifying the occupants of a vehicle. These roadblocks allow vehicles to be checked before continuing and could be used in an incident such as a hostage situation or any serious crime where a perimeter needs to be secured.

VII. REPORTING

- A. All officers involved in a vehicle pursuit shall submit an Incident Report or supplement report outlining the details of the pursuit to his District or Bureau Commander by the end of the shift.³⁷ The primary officer shall also complete a Pursuit Report within twenty-four (24) hours of the incident.³⁸
- B. The District or Bureau Commander will review the entire incident to ensure conformance with this General Order and to provide a meaningful critique to aid in future pursuits.³⁹
 - 1. The District or Bureau Commander will then forward these reports to the Quality Assurance Division and the Education and Training Division.
 - 2. The District or Bureau Commander will forward any reports for pursuits that are non-compliant with policy, involve a collision of any type, and/or involve the use of roadblocks or stop sticks to the appropriate Deputy Chief for review.
- C. The use of a tire deflation device will be documented in an Incident Report and on the Pursuit Form. The documentation of the use will cover the circumstances surrounding the use, weather and road conditions, and the effectiveness of the device.⁴⁰

³⁶ CALEA 41.2.3b

³⁷ CALEA 82.21a

³⁸ CALEA 41.2.2k, 82.2.1b

³⁹ CALEA 41.2.2k

⁴⁰ CALEA 41.2.3e and 82.2.1b

- D. Any time a roadblock is used it will be fully documented in an HCPD Incident Report.⁴¹
 - 1. The report will be forwarded for review to the Chief of Police through the Deputy Chief for Operations.
 - 2. Any procedural changes identified through the critique process will be approved by the Chief of Police.⁴²

VIII. TRAINING AND REVIEW

- A. All new sworn members shall be provided initial training on HCPD pursuit policies, forcible stops, and roadblocks.⁴³
- B. E&T will annually distribute a distance learning course to all sworn personnel or incorporate a pursuit policy review into annual in-service training.⁴⁴
- C. Annual Analysis of Pursuits⁴⁵
 - 1. The Chief of Police shall designate a member to conduct an annual analysis of all documented vehicle pursuits.
 - a. This analysis shall be designed to identify any potential patterns or trends that could indicate additional training needs, equipment upgrades, and/or policy modifications.
 - b. This analysis shall be submitted to the Chief of Police via the chain of command by March 1st of each year.
 - 2. A copy of the analysis shall be forwarded to the Education and Training Division and Accreditation Unit.
- D. Annual Policy Review
 - 1. The Chief of Police shall designate a member to conduct an annual review of all relevant pursuit policies, training, and reporting procedures that shall assess if current agency practices, policy, forms, and trainings are meeting the needs of the HCPD.
 - 2. A report of the findings shall be submitted to the Chief of Police via the chain of command by March 1st of each year. A copy of the report shall be forwarded to E&T, the Professional Standards Bureau, and the Accreditation Unit.
- E. When an officer's actions or use of force in an official capacity, e.g., roadblocks, vehicle pursuits, etc., results in death or serious physical injury, he shall be placed into an administrative assignment pending a departmental evaluation and review of the incident and the member's ability to resume his normal assignment, independent of the internal investigation.

⁴¹ CALEA 82.2.1b

⁴² CALEA 41.2.3e

⁴³ CALEA 41.2.2m

⁴⁴ CALEA 41.2.2n

⁴⁵ CALEA 41.2.2l

X. CANCELLATION

This General Order cancels and replaces General Order OPS-48, Pursuit Policy, dated October 31, 2016.

Authority:



Lisa D. Myers
Chief of Police